

Let's visit a serious question. How do Christians' understandings of the faith forge how they respond every day to the world around them...all the way to their local workplaces and neighborhoods? In other words, how do Christians look at and fruitfully engage with the world around them?

Hey, the world has "shrunk" a whole lot in the last hundred years—yeah, there's not been another era in history when people in one part of the world have paid so much attention as to what's going on in nations so far away. And that's foundationally happened due to the sense of intimacy created by 21st-century digital access and delivery...instant communications...extraordinary air travel efficiencies...and an ever-rising level of widespread prosperity to facilitate it all. But it still ultimately comes down to geography.

Truth be told, the U.S. has held the rapt attention of the affluent, connected world for at least a century—first, by it being the driving force for victory in two massive world wars, and then being the dominant economic powerhouse nation in the decades since. Of course, people do pay real attention to places like Europe and China, too. Hey...massive wars, global economics, and mega-politics capture our focus!

But there have been other captivating developments. The year 1948 saw the founding of modern Israel and that general time frame marked the start of serious development of vast Middle Eastern oil resources first discovered in 1908 in modern Iran. Deep conflicts between Israel and its neighbors rose, festered, and rose and festered again. All that has constantly put that ancient region on the radar of the world.

Obviously, that's especially true for many serious Christians in America. We can safely say that many such folks nowadays know—or at least *think* they know—a whole lot about the history and culture and conflicts in Israel and the Middle East. All that has worked to forcefully drive some strongly-held opinions about Bible prophecy and interpretations of "end times" in the books of Daniel and Revelation. Those and other complex opinions about *all* nations and their intertwined history, politics, religions, and people...well, that's all rolled together into what's come to be labeled as any particular Christian's "Biblical worldview."

For example, when you hear the word "*Iran*" nowadays (in this year 2024 when this podcast episode was published), what do you immediately think of? Is it Iran's serious threats to develop nuclear weapons? Or is it Iran's aggressive political agitation, support for terrorism, and military aggression in the Middle East through its evil, unhidden, dozen-or-so proxies like Hamas and Hezbollah? Yeah, Iran has relentlessly worked to earn its position near the top of the list of really bad actors on the geopolitical world stage!

But wait! Do you know what the highly respected expert on the Middle East Daniel Pipes wrote in *Newsweek*?... "Something religiously astonishing is taking place in Iran, where an Islamist government has ruled since 1979: Christianity is flourishing." By the way, Pipes is Jewish and has no agenda as to promoting Christianity. And research estimates are that there are now more than a million Christians in Iran—some say several million! These Christians operate "under the radar" in small house churches and are deeply persecuted when discovered. But that persecution evidently isn't stopping the increase in new believers!

So, why do Christians with what they call a "Biblical worldview" know a *geopolitical* narrative about Iran, but in my experience *often have never heard even one report* that Iranians are one of the fastest growing people-groups in Christianity? So, *just what really is* a "Biblical worldview" in a Christian's toolkit—is it an acute awareness of ever-shifting, headline-dominating geopolitics, including Israel...or is it informed and engaged knowledge of fruitful strategies for Kingdom increase and robust discipling...or is it maybe both?

Hey, the reality is that during the very era from 1948 until now—yeah, that's the entire time frame of modern Israel's existence—the world has seen the addition of hundreds of millions of fresh new believers worldwide, mostly where the experts call the Global South—you know, vast swaths of Africa...South America...Asia. Luke 15:10: "*There is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents!*" So, to be

blunt, where's the great rejoicing *among Christians* for this astounding-but-still-partial fulfillment of "God our Savior's desire that all people be saved" (1 Timothy 2:4 ESV)? How prevalent is *the Biblical worldview of increasing disciples in the Kingdom of God* in the hearts, minds, and actions of Christians?

Is this radical, maybe *too radical* to the ears of many? *Of course! Jesus has always been on a foundationally different track than priorities of the kingdoms of this world!* Instead, He does His Father's will. Yes, Peter wrote this: "The Lord is...not wishing that any should perish..." (2 Peter 3:9) Yes, *God our Savior desires all to be saved*. Including Jews. And Iranians. *Every ethnicity!* And that takes strategic Kingdom priority!

The past several decades, it seems Israel is indeed central to the Biblical worldview of many. The apparent root of these folks' dogged advocacy for singling out modern-day Israel is the oracle of Balaam by the Spirit of God *to Israel* captured in Numbers 24:9: "Blessed are those who bless you and cursed are those who curse you." So, for sure, many Christians sincerely and devoutly want to bless Israel, especially in this era of toxic antisemitism! And, yes, the Numbers 24:9 passage is certainly a key source for studying Jacob (who became Israel) and his descendants. But Genesis 12:1-3 is often quoted by many instead...

"Now the Lord said to Abram, 'Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.'" But is *this* passage limited to just Abraham's grandson Israel and his physical descendants—as some might suppose? Doesn't seem so—sure, *Numbers 24:9* is a grand, *Israel-specific* blessing called out in an oracle *to Israel*...but *Genesis 12* is about *Abraham!*

And Abraham was *not an Israelite* or part of Israel...rather, he is clearly *the grandfather* of Jacob who became Israel. And Abraham was *not a Jew*—that identity emerged much later from the Israelite tribe of Judah in the Southern Kingdom...rather, Abraham is clearly an *ancestor of Jews* through Jacob. Abraham was also the ancestor of Arabs through Ishmael and an ancestor of Edomites through Esau. Instead, Abraham was known as a *Hebrew*, which is sometimes said to have derived from his descending from Eber in the Bible. Astonishing as it seems to some, *Abraham was a Gentile who was also an ancestor of Jews!*

So, what about a New-Testament-informed focus on Genesis 12:1-3? Well, Abraham has a unique role as *the spiritual father of both Jews and Gentiles with the righteousness of faith in God!* (Romans 4:16) And here's Romans 4:13-14: "For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith. For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void." The promise to Abraham and his offspring is "heirs through faith"—*that includes us!* And that totally lines up with Jesus's Great Commission for people of faith to go forth and make disciples of all nations—*yes, you are blessed when you bless people with a righteous faith in Christ!* So, Jesus's disciples are to bless every ethnicity with the Gospel...to make new disciples! And Christians can *specifically* bless Israel ("for the gifts and callings of God are irrevocable") ...even as the hardened are in a "spirit of stupor." Paul describes Israel's intriguing status in Romans 11.

But just what is the *crucial* navigation here...a timeless strategy to stand on as *the key Biblical worldview in every era?* Sure, nations must do what kingdoms of this world do—make the best temporal decisions possible in a fallen world without making gross mistakes in moral equivalency. Yes, today's Iran is *not* to be handled as a peaceable nation. *Regardless*, obedient believers are to do what Jesus commands: go forth and make disciples of *all* nations! And that translates to this: *wherever* believers' workplaces and neighborhoods are, *our privilege* is to order our lives on God's primary, overriding priority—to proclaim the gospel of the Kingdom with eternal implications for every person...Jew or Gentile, Arab or Iranian, Mexican or Chinese. Hey, making new disciples is *the greatly-commissioned* Biblical worldview! Amazing.

A&A: Application & Action

1. Do you believe that God desires that every Jew in Israel and elsewhere in the world be saved? How about every Arab or Persian or Egyptian who lives in Israel and elsewhere in the world, too? As part of your considerations, be sure to address your understanding of 1 Peter 3:9 and 1 Timothy 2:4 (both passages are quoted in the episode). Discuss.

2. Do you occasionally stop to ponder the role of Abraham as your spiritual father in a righteous faith in God, luxuriating in God's grace without regard to the law (not yet given in Abraham's time, superseded by God's grace through Christ in ours)? Discuss.

3. Do you think that attentive unbelievers in America many times associate their Christian neighbors with a specific political framework...or with the salvific love and grace of Jesus Christ? Give specifics.

And what about how others—whether Christians or not—perceive *you*? Give specifics.